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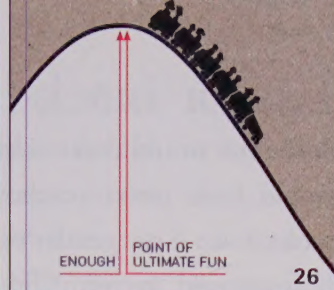
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ALL WHO HUNGER

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 6 JULY/AUGUST 2013

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VOICES

I am a snack hoarder.

And thus would make a lousy disciple. I would have never reached Top Twelve ranks (even if my gender wasn't an issue). If Jesus said to me, "Take nothing for [your] journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in [your] belts" (Mark 6: 8-9), I would reply, "Whoa there, Jesus. What about my peanut M&Ms and pretzel rods and quarters for a pop?"

You see, without my stash of snacks (and money and clothes and shoes), I feel deprived. Perhaps that has to do with being one of five children.

In her article, "The Gospel of Enough," Megan Torgerson says that not many people fancy the word *enough*. She writes, "No one really seems to like that word... It rarely gets used in a positive way.... We have been taught to believe that you can never have too much of a good thing, and strangely enough, we seem to believe it."

In our Bible study this month, we also see that Jesus sends the 12 out "two by two." Now, that's another issue I would have balked at. I would rather go alone, thank you very much. I am an introvert like writer Julie Sevig. "Perhaps you've been encouraged to 'take your turn' at leading the Bible study but the mere suggestion of it makes your palms sweat or your heart race," she writes in "Gifts of an Introvert."

..."Whatever the assignment or job, you may have thought—or even said out loud (*that* would be brave)—'You can't *possibly* be serious!' as the author of this issue's Bible study session suggests."

In session 2, "Do We Have Enough?" Bible study author Audrey Novak Riley recounts being asked to take a prominent role in a civic organization. And the words that popped into her head were—you guessed it: "You can't be serious!" That's probably exactly what the disciples were thinking, too, when Jesus told them to take off and spread the good news without much more than the clothes on their backs.

When you work for, with, or in the church, sometimes you just have to ask others to pitch in and help. Often those "opportunities" lead to faith discoveries as they did with Martha Sterne.

"The best ask I got early on was shortly after I joined a church, and the pastor noticed me somehow," she writes in "Just Ask Around."

The pastor asked Sterne to serve on the mission committee and then a little later to become chairperson of the committee. "Truth be told, he was right," she wrote. "I had a passion for ministry to the poor. His throwing me into the deep end made me swim."

Within three years, Sterne was in seminary and is now an Episcopal priest. Sometimes when we are asked to step outside our comfort zones, we discover gifts we never knew we had.

And we find out that we do have enough. God makes sure of that.

Like Torgerson writes in her article "May we each discover the ridiculousness of God's enough as it gives us exactly what we need, each and every day." 🌿

Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Gather* magazine.

Enough Already

by Terri Lackey



GIVE US THIS DAY

You Are Enough

by Kristine J. Ruffatto

My husband, Scot, and

I recently drove from Wisconsin to Saskatchewan. Twenty-three hours in the car gives one a lot of time to think. As we drove through Minnesota, I remembered the cabin we used to rent every July when our boys were little. Our week at the cabin was always our favorite vacation. Scot would fish, the boys would swim, and I would read.

One afternoon while I was sitting outside, I looked out at Scot with his fishing pole on the dock and the boys on the beach with their friends, and suddenly it hit me: Here we were, mom and dad and two kids on vacation at a cabin. *We had arrived.* This was what I had been looking forward to my whole life. I had a husband, children, an education, a job, a house, a minivan, and a vacation on a lake. This was the American dream, and I was living it.

But I remember thinking: Why doesn't it *feel* like I've arrived? If this is it, why aren't I satisfied? Why does it still seem that it's not enough?

Now don't get me wrong: I have a wonderful marriage and two great kids. I love my house and my job. But it occurs to me that somehow *this isn't all there is to life.* Because if it is, then what about all those people who never reach this middle-class dream, no matter how hard they try? What about those who never find someone to share their life with or who can't have a child? What if you can never afford a house, a minivan, a vacation? If this is what life is all about, why do so few in this world ever reach it?

And why is it that when you do reach it, it still sometimes seems as though something is missing?

Arriving isn't enough. There are still empty places in our lives—hunger that doesn't seem really filled.

Achieving the American dream doesn't fully satisfy us. Mates, children, and careers cannot fill all of our needs. Even if we had all that we wanted, it would still not be enough.

Our stomachs may be full, our houses may be full, but what will fill our minds, our hearts, our souls?

Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus said to this crowd, "You are hungry, but what you are hungry for won't fill you! What you want is something perishable. It won't last. You will still be hungry, hungry for something that will *really* fill you. You will still be thirsty. Even if you get what you want, you will still have empty places that are not filled" (paraphrase of John 6).

We want something to fulfill us, and Jesus says, "Take me! Everything else perishes . . . but I am the bread of life. Come to me, and you will never hunger. Believe in me and you will never thirst."

There is only one person who can really satisfy our hunger. Only Jesus will be there for us, always. *Only Jesus will be enough.*

We are hungry, Lord. Fill us. Be our bread. We know you are enough. 🌿

The Rev. Dr. Kristine J. Ruffatto is a wife, mother, pastor, and professor of Old Testament at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

JUST ASK A R O U N D

by Martha Sterne

Yes!

Yabetchya.

OK.

I will.

I come from a mixed family of bad askers and good askers, as well as some excellent askees (that is, those who are being asked) and some unskilled ones. I have personally moved from the category of lousy asker and terrible askee to being pretty good at both. The church actually helped me make the transition to a higher level of all aspects of asking.

In my younger days I would rather have gotten a root canal than ask anybody for something other than to pass the salt. My husband was even worse. Carroll actually would pre-emptively take on something he did not remotely know how to do or want to do in order to avoid the faintest possibility of having to ask somebody something. Ask Directions? Of course not. Not in a car, not in a store. Not on his life.

The most dire not-asking situation I remember in our early parenthood was when Carroll did not ask anybody what was involved in being a Cub Scout leader and agreed to do it just because nobody else raised their hand. He had never ever been a scout at any age or done anything with his hands or been an outdoors person.

On the one hand, his venture into scouting was pathetic. Here is what a scout is: "Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, Reverent." After 44 years of close observation I can tell you that Carroll is all but two of these things almost every day. On the other hand, roping himself into being a scout leader just to avoid the anxiety of an unanswered ask? Well, that

I can do it.

if you need someone...



did more harm than good. He spent a school year of Wednesday nights in an unheated, dank church basement with listless volunteers and seven or eight restless little boys.

Should Carroll have asked himself whether he wanted to be a Cub Scout leader? Of course. Did he? No. To give the guy credit, he eventually became a gold-standard volunteer. I think he really learned from the scout debacle. Take it from Carroll: Don't say yes to something you don't have an interest in or a skill to share unless it is an urgent matter of life, death, or integrity.

Patching leaks

Perhaps the best gift we can give ourselves for guidance about asking is to have author and theologian

Frederick Buechner's quote tattooed on our foreheads: "The place God calls you to is the place where *your* deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." It took some mistakes and some misdirections, but that quote is pretty much what Carroll and I try to use as our northern star.

Carroll is deeply gladdened by order in the universe. He's not persnickety, but he wants to be able to understand how things fit together and especially how ministries can sustain themselves over time. He is excellent on boards because he does his homework and understands the difference between being informed and micromanaging.

There have been many boards along his journey, but what I particularly remember was his ministry as a

transformative board chair for a struggling major non-profit in Atlanta. What he learned from that almost sinking ship is that the board's job is not to try to rush around and patch leaks; the board's job is to select a good leader and get behind her or him. Carroll's deep gladness is to support people trying to do good in God's world and help them succeed. No matter what he is doing, that is what he is really doing.

When we moved to East Tennessee, Carroll volunteered for several years at a residence for mentally ill men. He befriended some guys and played cards with them and got a grill and barbecued with them. Mental illness has touched our family—and yours, too, if you think about it—for generations, and so this interest was not out of thin air. Then he went on the board and eventually learned how to lobby the legislature. Through the excellence of the Helen Ross McNabb Center, Carroll not only gave of his best self, he got more of his best self. He worked hard for them, and it gave him back his optimism and faith.

Head on out

Carroll is Roman Catholic, and often beyond frustrated with his tradition. He is too hard-headed to leave, but if going to mass was all that he did to be fed by God, it would be thin gruel. Since the institutional church is driving him crazy, he has found church in small-group ministries. This is a huge shout-out to anybody who is irritated with their pastor, congregation, denomination, whatever. The institutional church is frustrating and full of sin. Get over it. Church is not a perfect beloved community. If the church were perfect, how would you fit in?

Notice that I call Carroll's work with both secular and church groups *ministry* because it always is. Jesus never asked us to line up and go to church and get our assignment for ministry there. Jesus just said gather, praise God, pass on what has been given to you, feed each other, and head on out and love the world. Some-

times Jesus himself did that loving the world through religious structures, more often not.

Now that we are back in Atlanta, Carroll volunteers with St. Vincent de Paul, a Roman Catholic social service ministry for the working poor. With a ministerial partner, he is in and out of people's lives helping with short-term crises. He is organized, savvy, and up on all the city resources. He trains other volunteers and does some projects for the city-wide umbrella organization.

He also works as the slightly paid legislative aide to one of our college friends who is the longtime go-to Georgia legislator for social justice and children and youth legislation. Carroll's years in Tennessee prepared him for this and most days he has a ball. I am not sure he can tell the difference between the Georgia General Assembly and his old friends at the residence for people with mental illness, but that's okay.

Discernment and passion

I have taken a different path over these years, but I, too, am better at asking and answering than I was 30 years ago.

The best ask I got early on was shortly after I joined a church, and the pastor noticed me somehow. He asked me to be on the mission committee. And then a few months later—I know this sounds like a horrible mistake with my being so new—he came up to me at a picnic and asked if I would like to be the chair of the mission committee. Truth be told, he was right. I had a passion for ministry to the poor. His throwing me into the deep end made me swim.

I got out of being the chair pretty quickly (not below my committee allergy), but I developed an employment ministry in the public housing community where the church had a presence. And three years after that, I was in seminary.

Here's how that went, a lot of asking. I thought I heard God asking me to enter ordained life. I asked the community to help me discern. The discernment

process asked me a lot of hard questions. I answered. And now here I am where I belong, an Episcopal priest almost 25 years. I have done a lot of asking and answering since then. I know now some things I didn't know then. Such as:

I AM NOT CUT OUT for committee meetings. Can't sit still. Sometimes it helps if it is just not called a committee. So at my parish we call things I go to "teams" or "project groups" or our latest buzz word "nodes." It helps for me to think in terms of a gathering of people for a particular purpose and when the purpose goes away, so does the group. In the Book of Revelation, Scripture tells us in heaven there will be no church. But in the meantime, remember that we gather to praise God, pass on what has been given to us, feed each other, and send each other out.

I AM CUT OUT for discernment groups. If we could turn all committees on to discernment of gifts and passions for self and others, I think the church would catch fire. I am actually doing that right now as "Writer in Residence" at my parish. What I really do is help others write/tell what they pay attention to, are astounded by, and want to pass on. Huge shift for me. I can sit still in these gatherings.

I HAVE LEARNED that everybody has a circadian rhythm. My energy and synapse connections kind of fade out about 4 p.m. I want to go home. Don't ask anything of me after that. This is genetic. My brother gave me this strategy. He is a great doctor and a good mentor to young docs, but he has told his department that unless they are going to fire him at a meeting, he is not coming to any night meetings. I say that now, too. I am okay to Skype or conference call—

anything except getting in the car in the dark in Atlanta traffic. That's my peculiarity. What is yours? What if we talked together about how to be in ministry together in the most effective, life-giving ways?

ALSO, I SAY NO. And stop. I say "Thank you, but I am not able to do this at this time." The sheer ability to say no helps me immensely to say yes.

Seek and find

Sometimes it just takes being really seen with your gifts and talents to get you moving into the depth of life. When Hagar had the child, Ismael, her mistress, the barren Sarai immediately despised her and Hagar ran away. And in the running, she runs into God who speaks to her words of comfort and guidance. Hagar called God "You-Are-The-God-Who-Sees-Me," and her life unfolds in holy ways from that encounter.

I really try to remember that we are ambassadors for the God Who Sees Us when I ask or am asked for anything. I ask myself am I seeing this person in this moment of asking? Am I being seen by this person in this moment of asking? For if seeing each other by the grace and light of God is happening, then life will unfold in holy ways no matter what the answer.

Finally, Jesus said seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. Ask and you will receive. Sometimes this all happens in a different order like a door opens without you seeking a thing. But holding onto those actions that Jesus gives—Seek, Knock, Ask—helps me not to be afraid. If I do those things and the answers are not there or the answer is no, then maybe what I need is right around the corner. Ask around. It's true. 🌸

The Rev. Martha Sterne is associate rector at Holy Innocents' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Ga. She is author of two books: *Earthly Good* and *Alive and Loose in the Ordinary*. She and her husband, Carroll, have two grown children and two grandchildren.



FAMILY MATTERS

Playing for Keeps

by Elyse Nelson Winger

Minneapolis winters

made for lots of ping pong. Relegated to the chilly basement, my sister, Emily, and I spent hours perfecting our serves and spins, playing two out of three or best of five. Confined to a Milwaukee brace for scoliosis during those years, ping pong was about as sporty as I could get as I swayed my steel-encased torso to and fro, relying only on my wrist and paddle skills to stay in the game. I may even have broken a sweat.

Emily and I were a good match because we had a common purpose: beating Dad. Dad was ping pong king, and he always won. He rarely played light to assuage our egos. There were never gentle serves or fly ball returns for the sake of a longer volley. He was all business. So when I won by two points one evening in eighth grade, I was ecstatic. And Dad? Frankly, he was irritated. I know he loved me to pieces, but losing ping pong was not something he enjoyed. Turns out, I don't enjoy it much either.

In a game of doubles with my son, Daniel, versus Emily and her son, Aidan, last spring—having lost our lead and now losing badly—I was irritated. “Daniel,” I said, in a not-too-kind tone. “You need to *focus*.” I love my boy to pieces, but losing ping pong put any competitive gene I had into play. In that moment, Dad was alive and well. Why am I telling you all this? Because family ping pong tournaments are the beginning and end of my competitive sports experience. It's all I've got. And I've got to have *some-*

thing, because raising a girl and a boy in 21st century America requires finding ways to both tap into the joy and resist the excesses of organized, competitive sports.

Many of us mark time by the seasons: winter, spring, summer, fall. Some of us flow best with the liturgical calendar: Advent, Lent, Easter, Pentecost. Not so Daniel. For him, the year is best understood this way: hockey, soccer, baseball, basketball. “For everything there is a season,” and a time for every piece of sports gear imaginable: a time for skates and a time for cleats; a time for bats and a time for sticks; and a time for pucks and a time for balls.

Every season, this gear is assessed, hand-me-downs evaluated, wish lists made. The backyard becomes a practice field for the sport du jour, and as I watch Daniel from the kitchen window, his mouth moving between shots or swings, I know he's deep in the imaginary play-by-play that places him in the heart of the action where thousands cheer and his team triumphs.

Catherine's different. Her competitive gene is definitely at work, but team sports have more to do with friendships than fantasies about the Hall of Fame. On the volleyball court, the girls do a choreographed dance after every point scored; from the sidelines, they cheer every player on. And while I am sure there is some middle school drama playing out here and there, what we parents enjoy seeing is a diverse group of classmates, at various levels of expertise

delighting in one another's success. This dynamic doesn't just happen: it's due to both great coaching and good policy.

Through sixth grade, it's all about equal playing time for every girl, no matter what. In fact, both kids' team experience, in house leagues or school teams, has been marked by equality of opportunity on the court, field, or rink. But it's just now that I am beginning to realize how fleeting that reality is . . . and how equality of opportunity in a youth sports context is only relative.

Long before we paid a \$25 activity fee for a season of school-sponsored sports, we started shell-ing out for park programs, club teams, summer camps, equipment, tanks of gas, and fast food.

We planned family vacations around tournaments. We let Catherine cram for piano lessons after a week of daily basketball but no Bach. We even started negotiating Sunday morning schedules, with Daniel kneeling at the communion rail wearing eau de hockey. And while Stewart and I decided early on that travel teams and year-round sports were out of the question, I experience our lives increasingly dominated by the sports calendar and a culture obsessed with sports specialization from preschool on up.

The equality of opportunity I have loved within my kids' teams

says nothing about the lack of opportunity for families who can't afford to buy these experiences for their children. Yes, *buy*. We consume youth sports.

In his book *The Most Expensive Game in Town: The Rising Cost of Youth Sports and the Toll on Today's Families*, author Mark Hyman tells the story of one family who spent more than \$8,000 on one year's sports expenses for three children—from gear to gas—and of another who spent that same amount on a year of travel hockey alone. He tells of parents who skip paying essential household bills for extra training sessions and who travel thousands of miles to tournaments to watch their child hardly play.

Our family isn't in this league, but we could sign on anytime. It's all right here for the taking and paying. But this I know: When inordinate amounts of household income and time are devoted to our children's sports experiences, when parents' dreams for their children include the elusive college sports scholarship, when competition among *parents* drives us to push our kids to win and then judge them if they fail to produce—we have a spiritual crisis at play. We're playing for the wrong kind of gold.

"You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All

good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally" (1 Corinthians 9:24–25, *The Message*).

I wonder if the apostle Paul's comparison to the Greco-Roman sports culture of his day could be helpful in ours, for (original context of mission aside) the



end of sports does not have to be who gets the scholarship, goes pro, or even wins by two points. The end of sports can instead be the joy that comes from harnessing our competitive genes for a common good, training hard and playing well together, using our bodies and minds to the best of our abilities, and creating community where no one is left out due to lack of income or ability.

Everywhere we can, we should say no to the excesses of a consumer society that keeps selling us the gold standard, but we which know will only tarnish and fade. ❧

The Rev. Ellyn Nelson Winger, an LLM pastor, serves as University chaplain at Indiana Wesleyan University in Bloomington, IN, and is also pastor, Stewart, have the platform culture too (Baker).

TIPS FOR SERVICE

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp

Jesus said, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?"

Mark 6:37

As the second session of our Bible study in this issue indicates, a natural and fair response to Jesus' directive to feed 5,000 people is to ask, "Are you serious?"

It so happens that Jesus is serious. And yet, in our seriousness to respond graciously and in a hospitable manner we don't always know how to "give them something to eat."

Here are seven tips (or you might even consider them recipes) on how your circle, your family and friends, your congregation and your community can take seriously Jesus' words, "you give them something to eat."

As we hear this command two words jump out at us, "You" and "something." Jesus didn't say, "organize a committee" or "take a survey." Jesus is speaking to each one of us. It is freeing to note that Jesus did not say, "give them everything to eat." He said something. And that something was a combination of protein (fish) and carbohydrate (bread). The crowd was hungry for bread and the bread of life.



FEED YOURSELF FIRST

This comes from the wisdom of flying on an airplane. We've all heard the reminder that in the event of cabin pressure we should secure our own mask first. Initially, those words sound almost selfish. However, if you don't have enough oxygen to breath, you won't be able to assist anyone else.

The idea is the same when referring to having a steady diet or intake of God's word and worship as it is with eating healthy food. Be mindful of your own intake or lack thereof. Are you participating in a group to read and discuss Scripture? Before you can offer someone else nourishment, you must be nourished.

At our congregation, Bethany Lutheran in Denver, Colo., Deborah Circle participants discovered that meeting once a month wasn't enough to satisfy their hunger. So during the school year, the group meets every week. This steady routine of gathering together feeds their souls.

Are you intentional about what you eat and drink? We all know that when we "fuel" differently we "feel" differently.

2



GATHER TOGETHER

A lovely line from the Didach (a late first or early second century document also called "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles") is illustrated in the hymn, "As the Grains of Wheat," by Marty Haugen. The refrain of the song (used with permission*) is below. The words are a prayer for harmony and unity that we might be one in the One who makes all things new.

*As the grains of wheat once scattered on the hill
were gathered into one to become our bread;
so may all your people from all the ends of earth
be gathered into one in you.*

There is great power in gathering. Try using the word *Gather* as an instructional acrostic:

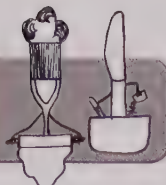
Gather
Advocate
Teach
Hear God's word and each other
Energize
Reflect

As you gather, you will discover and uncover the needs in your community. In our Bible study, we read that the people had gathered around Jesus in a deserted place and it was getting late. Once you know what the needs of the people are, you can decide to gather or collect items that benefit the community.

In our congregation we often gather food and non-perishable items on festival days like Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and Thanksgiving for distribution through some of our partner social service agencies.



3



PARTNER WITH OTHERS

You don't have to do it by yourself! We remember a time in our lives when we each thought we had to do everything by ourselves without involving others. It can be hard to ask for help. The reluctance to ask for help often makes us feel overburdened or exhausted. When we partner as companions, our joy is deeper as is our sense of compassion and community. (The word *companion* has the word *pan* in it, which means *bread*, and translated, *companions* are "those you break bread with.")

Figure out who in your congregation or community can serve as a partner and distributor. Connect your ability to gather with those who really know how to distribute what you gather. Our circles at church routinely gather supplies for a local women's shelter. When each person brings something, there is abundance. Together we make a difference. People are more likely to bring an item if they believe others are going to participate.

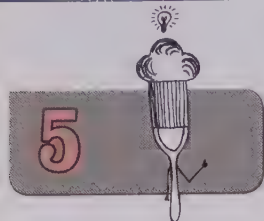
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HAVE A CAN-DO ATTITUDE

Being positive makes a difference. We ask you to say that with us: "Being positive makes all the difference in the world." As our study indicates Jesus didn't focus on what the disciples didn't have, but rather on what they did have. In the third session of our Bible study, we see that Jesus places confidence in his disciples. He gives them an assignment and they are expected to carry it out, with equal confidence.

In Luke 9:13, Jesus clearly expects the disciples to be able to give the crowd something to eat. And he expects them to have a can-do attitude about it. When we have Jesus backing us, anything is possible.



BE MINDFUL OF OPPORTUNITIES

You can turn everyday situations into opportunities. For example, you can offer “can-gratulations” to someone in your community or church who is celebrating a special milestone. Granted for the individual, that’s not an everyday situation, but someone celebrates a birthday or anniversary or special milestone almost every day. Take the opportunity to celebrate with them and offer a service to the community while you are doing it.

At our church, we buy several cans of soup or vegetables for our local food pantry, then we set out the cans to spell 65 (for a 65th wedding anniversary or a 65th birthday) or REV (for an intern’s ordination as a rostered leader of the church). We give the food to the pantry and send a card to the honorees with a picture of their “can-gratulations” of their special day.



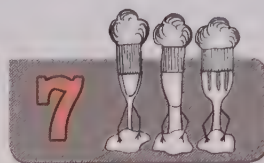
DO A FOOD BREAK DOWN

The Bible study tells us that the disciples feared it would take 200 denarii and two tons of food to feed the 5,000 people surrounding Jesus. That’s a lot of food.

Several times each year, our congregation purchases in bulk 2,000 pounds of beans and 2,000 pounds of rice (in 50 pound bags). Then during the time between services we do a “food break down.” We take those 50 pound bags and redistribute the food into one pound bags. We ask families, couples, and individuals to help. We have figured out that we can redistribute all 2,000 pounds to one-pound bags in less than one hour.

It is an amazing intergenerational opportunity for service and it helps to raise awareness of the needs in our community. Our local food pantry distributes an average of 4,000 pounds every day. Folks are shocked that all the food—two tons of it—will be shared with

hungry people in the next 24 hours. Our congregation becomes aware of the food challenges in the community when it realizes that 364 more events just like ours need to be completed to keep pace with the local hunger demands.



BAKE BREAD TOGETHER

Ron loves to bake. He loves to make pretzels and communion bread. He often invites children, families, and altar guild members to bake communion bread with him. He believes that when people take the time to get their hands in dough that will be shared by others, they begin to understand some of the deeper issues in our community.

In his book, *Finding Happiness: Monastic Steps for a Fulfilling Life*, Abbot Christopher Jamison wrote, “Never has so much food been as easily and quickly available as it is today, and yet Western culture suffers from both too much eating and too little, from obesity and anorexia, or other eating disorders.”

We find ourselves today in this world of tensions and contradictions. The disciples were in a similar spot. They didn’t know how to feed the 5,000 until they trusted Jesus.

And that’s what we do when we gather around the table of our Lord. We trust Jesus to help us fulfill what he has instructed us to do. We answer his command, “You give them something to eat.” 🌸

Sue Ann Glusenkamp is a registered nurse and clinical educator at Porter Hospital in Denver. She has served as a parish nurse and now teaches others how to do it. She is a runner who is passionate about health and wellness. She loves her Deborah Circle and is intentional about raising up health women and girls. **Ron Glusenkamp** is senior pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church, Cherry Hills Village, Colo. He enjoys baking and walking long distances. They have been married 37 years.



LET US PRAY

Called to Be Food and Drink

by Julie K. Ageson

The hymn "Christ Be

Our Light" begins: *Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst. Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed.**

Again and again, Scripture and its interpretation in word and song, in water, wine, and bread call us to be food and drink for one another.

Yesterday was another of those Sundays when the liturgy and music spoke so powerfully that God's presence was palpable—literally touched and felt. During the service our voices came together in a plaintive longing for light and life, food and shelter, truth and wholeness. We sang of our hunger and of the hunger of the world.

Then, gathering around the table, we were both fed and sent. Some took bread and wine to those who could not be present. Children collected money for Souper Bowl Sunday. A group of college students invited participation in Habitat for Humanity projects.

Fair trade products of coffee and chocolate were purchased to support farmers who pay fair wages and treat employees with dignity. Prayers for peace were offered. Several worshipers made plans to serve at the local homeless shelter the next evening.

I understand these words—*called to be food and drink for one another*—to mean that the Spirit of God is present in each of us, making us God's dwelling place and home. As God's home, we bear Christ to the world around us. In the events of each day, we are called to be

light and life, food and shelter, justice seekers, pain bearers, life givers, peace-makers—just as Christ is all these things for us. In a world where hunger comes in many forms, this is salvation. This is God's kingdom, the body of Christ, here and now.

*Longing for shelter, many are homeless, longing for warmth, many are cold. Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone.**

O God, make us a church of living stones. Make us your bread. Make us your living voice. Rescue us from self-absorption. Drive out the fears that seem to haunt us all. Help us embrace a new way of being and of seeing. Show us how to be food and drink for one another.

Speak to us in liturgy and song. Help us hear your voice in the stories of Scripture, in one another, and in all the events of life.

Generous God, transform us into a living, breathing church and make of us food and drink for one another. Help us become us, the body of Christ.

*Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong. Let us be servants to one another, signs of your kingdom come. Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.**

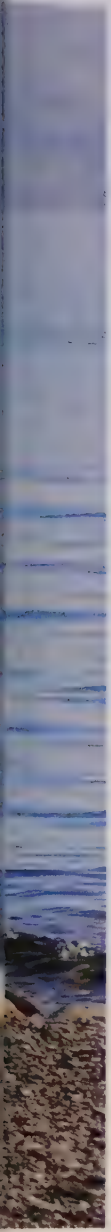
Julie Ageson recently retired from ELCA Resource Center leadership, leads for the Eastern North Dakota Synod and is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers. She and her spouse will retire and travel during this transition while living at their family gathering place, Westport, in West Glacier, Mont.



The sun was setting on the warm, late summer day. The sunset was soft apricot and gold blending into the early evening sky. The view of the lake was spectacular. We could hear the waves lapping on the rocky shore just a few feet away. The birds were cooing long in the twilight. As we looked to the hills on the other side of the lake, everything was peaceful.

MY TABLE IN GALILEE

by Kathy J. Magnus



We walked into the dining room of the retreat hotel and saw the welcoming tables with white table cloths and tiny shimmering candles. The four of us chose a table and ordered a bottle of wine. We smiled in wonder at one another. How in the world did we get here?

We sat just a few feet from the beautiful Sea of Galilee. Earlier in the day we walked the hillside where Jesus fed the 5,000 and we took a boat out onto the waters that Jesus had calmed. This was Jesus' neighborhood!

We almost reverently expressed our thoughts as we sat at the table sipping our wine and enjoying a plate of olives and bread. Did Jesus sit near here with his friends as they roasted fish after a long day's work? Did they laugh and tell stories as we did? Did they realize the gift of the friendships they enjoyed? Did they gaze in amazement as the evening sun burnished the hills?

We were four very different women who had formed a friendship that was strong, adventuresome, and unique. Susan was a pastor and a leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Linda was a financial administrator for Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. Abby was an M. Div. student at the University of Chicago, and I was head of the North America Desk of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). We came to know each

other through our attendance at council meetings of the LWF.

We ranged in age from 26 to 58 and had agreed to travel together for a few days following an LWF meeting in "the little town of Bethlehem." We wanted to see more of the places we had heard of since childhood,

places with names such as Jericho, Capernaum, Tiberius, and Nazareth. Today we saw camels in the Judean wilderness, put our bare feet into the River Jordan, and learned that the locusts John the Baptist ate may not have been insects, but rather the sweet carob-like pods from the locust tree.

As we ordered a meal of fish and grilled vegetables and enjoyed the ambiance, our conversation turned to our own faith stories and what this trip meant to each of us. It was an easy place to talk about faith—this place so rich in the Bible stories we all knew by heart. We talked of struggle and joy, of self-doubt and deep belief. We talked of the agony of loss and illness, the delight in relationships, and the openness to discern where God was calling each of us.

Like many of you, we are women of faith, brought together by the activity of the church in the world. On that night, we built strong and important friendships as we shared our own stories and remembered the life-shaping, world-shaping stories of this place handed down through the ages. We were women gathered at the table, sharing friendship, food, and faith in Jesus' old neighborhood.

After dinner, as I walked back along the lake to my room, I reflected on the conversation. I marveled at this place. I grew up on a lakeshore, but this particular lakeshore was different. This was Jesus' lake. I was walking on the shores of Galilee!

I bent and picked up a few smooth, gray stones and put them in my pocket. I realized that Jesus undoubtedly did the same thing countless times. My stones continue to remind me of a lovely night and a table of deep and intimate conversation. They remind me of the miracle of the Word made flesh that dwells among all of us. ☸

Kathy J. Magnus served as the vice president of the ELCA 1990-1997 and for several years as staff of the Lutheran World Federation. She and her husband, Richard, live in the Twin Cities and are members of Edina Lutheran Community Church.



EARTH WISE

Saguaros of Faith

by Terry L. Bowes

I can't help but sing along with Gene Kelly as he dances down that rainy street in the 1952 movie, *Singin' in the Rain*. I bob and sway as he swings on lamp posts and jumps into and out of puddles. My heart grins along with him as he lifts his face to the rain.

I confess that I am jealous. I love rain. I am in love with rain the way only a person who lives in a semi-arid area like Colorado can be. Here, we feel fortunate if we receive a couple of "Singin' in the Rain" days each year. Without irrigation, growing crops here is an impossible undertaking.

Fortunately, while we Coloradans cannot rely on spring rain, we can usually count on winter snow in the mountains. Besides making skiers ecstatic, that snow provides those of us on the flatland with irrigation water as it melts.

The water is collected in reservoirs to provide water to cities and towns. We wait with bated breath for the snow pack measurements in the mountains because our welfare and our growing season depend on it.

It is not uncommon for water here to be rationed for irrigating lawns and flower beds. Houses are assigned watering days based on an even number-odd number address system.

In the past few years, states that have always trusted that the rain would come are experiencing devastating drought. Pictures of stunted corn and cracked, dry earth stand in stark contrast to Gene Kelly's dripping fedora. Farmers are helpless and hapless. The ongoing drought

has also created a new black market commodity—hay. Hay has become so expensive that farmers are forced to contemplate whether to keep cattle when the cost of the hay to feed them exceeds the value of the cattle or milk. Thieves are stealing hay in one region to sell in another.

The current ongoing drought leads to some wacky ideas. One I've heard recently is the possibility of towing an iceberg from the Arctic to the mouth of a river in California. Another is to build a 700 mile water pipeline from the Missouri River to Denver. No one seems to appreciate that the water would have to flow uphill.

The worst drought in U.S. history, of course, was the decade long Dust Bowl of the 1930s. One man recalls that the air was so full of dust that the sun was blotted out. Chickens roosted in their chicken houses and slept in midday, thinking it was night. The Dust Bowl was caused partly by weather and exacerbated by people and destructive farming techniques. Isn't that how we humans work? I can always make a bad situation worse with my thoughtlessness or selfishness.

Constant drought in other parts of the world leads to civil war, desperate refugees, and starvation. In the horn of Africa, famine resulting from drought has killed over 40 million people in the 20th century alone. Precious children die. Endangered species of animals are exterminated. We need rain. We need water. Please, God.



CAFÉ:

A COMMUNITY OF WOMEN

by Elizabeth McBride

Sarah Dunbar attended a Cincinnati Cyclone hockey game with her Café group and their spouses two years ago. While the fans were booing a player from the opposing team, she jumped up and screamed, "Jesus loves you!" because she thought the other fans were being "too mean."

This group of young adult women and their daughters (age three to 10) meet regularly to discuss the articles that appear in *Café*, Women of the ELCA's on-line magazine for young adult women. Jessica Gill, the Café group organizer, also arranges social outings like the hockey game, so they can include their spouses and children.

This Café group expresses the different ways that "a community of women" involved in Women of the ELCA can gather. Sarah says that although she loves to meet with the women in her Café group, she also appreciates that her husband and her young child can participate. Like many young adult couples, she and her husband often have difficulty spending quality time together because of the demands of their jobs and their family. Weekends become sacred time for families, so this Café group meets with just women during the week and arranges family social events on the weekend.

At her former congregation, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Fairfield, Ohio, Jessica Gill formed a Café group because she was active in a Women of the ELCA unit with her mom, Sherry. But she wanted to meet with other young adult women. Since that time, the Café group grew and its connection to the

women in the Women of the ELCA unit deepened.

Four years later, Jessica attends a different church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Middletown, Ohio, not far from her home. Now she and the women of Bethlehem Lutheran are meeting regularly as a Café group. The pastor, the Rev. Michelle Terry, and I were invited to the Café group that Jessica hosted.

After we chatted briefly, we enjoyed a small spread of fruit, sandwiches, cheese, and a plate of cookies that Jessica's 10-year-old daughter, Morgan, artfully arranged. Jessica opened the gathering by sharing a litany that she downloaded from the Women of the ELCA website.

Participants read different parts of the two articles by the Rev. Jeni Grangaard that appeared in the March issue on website (boldcafe.org). The topic was about creating an authentic community by being honest and vulnerable.

This theme seemed to resonate with the women, and each spoke honestly about different issues in her life. Jessica led the discussion by asking the questions that appeared at the end of one of the articles.

We then closed the meeting with a prayer led by Sarah who said the closing prayer is offered by a different person every time they meet.

The Women of the ELCA purpose statement begins with, "As a community of women...." This Café group was an authentic, caring community of women supporting and encouraging one another—and having a lot of fun. 🌿

Elizabeth McBride is the editor of *Café* and the director for intergenerational programs.

Interested in starting your own Café group? Visit boldcafe.org and click on "café groups."



Faith. Vocation. Relationships.

Café (boldcafe.org) is an on-line publication for young adult women by Women of the ELCA, the women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Available on iTunes as a podcast.

Café is a publication of
Women ^{of the} **ELCA** 

GIFTS OF AN



by Julie B. Sevig

For more than 15 years I was in a vocation that required me to be more extrovert than introvert. I was a youth director.

To do that job I learned guitar well enough to make it through a handful of camp songs, I gave plenty of children's sermons, and I routinely led groups and stood in front of people, tapping into as much rah-rah personality as I could muster. The job—at two different large churches—drained me.

I'm not saying I wasn't any good at it. In fact, I was pretty good, and there was much joy in it. But as I reflect on several decades of work life (and sift through a file full of results from random personality inventories), I'm keenly aware I'm not suited for that job today.

Maybe you've had the same experience. Perhaps you've been encouraged to take your turn at leading the Bible study but the mere suggestion of it makes your palms sweat or your heart race. Or maybe you've been sentenced to church kitchen duty when you'd much rather be behind the microphone or working the crowd as part of a hospitality team. Whatever the assignment or job, you may have thought—or even said out loud (*that* would be brave)—“You can't *possibly* be serious!” as the author of this issue's Bible study session suggests.

My dear readers who consider themselves extroverted, the next few paragraphs are directed to introverts—so perhaps you'd like to grab a cup of coffee and find someone with whom to visit—or better yet, a party.

THEY'RE EVERYWHERE

Last year, Susan Cain became God's gift to introverts with her book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* (Crown). It landed in the Top

10 of several book lists and in the hands of many introverts. Both this book, and *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture* by Adam S. McHugh (2009, IVP Books), shine new light, understanding, and respect for what experts now think may be half the U.S. population.

You probably already know something about introverts whether you are one or not, whether you've used the term or not. Don't confuse introversion with shyness, though they sometimes overlap. It's more about where we get our energy or feel comfortable. As an introvert, some of the ways I'd describe myself are:

“I prefer a few good friends who I know well, rather than many.”

“With those friends, I like conversations that are meaningful and deep, not small talk.”

“I need to think things through before I act.”

“I feel comfortable being alone.”

“In a large group discussions—especially with people I don't know—I likely won't say anything. But I'm listening and taking everything in.”

Cain's book confirmed many things I know about myself. And she critiques what many of us know to be true about American culture: We do much to raise up and praise extroverts and extroverted behavior. In truth, many great leaders, artists, and activists have been introverted.

Without their contributions, we'd be without art, writing, and music that make our souls sing. Without their patient discoveries and innovation, we'd be without mind-boggling scientific progress that has changed our lives. Without their tender care and quiet negotiations, our households and nations would be without the healing and peace many enjoy.

Cain writes about famous introverts in her book, and many websites offer similar lists. There are even sites dedicated to attaching a personality type to biblical characters, which brings us to the Apostle Peter.

UNFILTERED PETER

In his book, Adam McHugh unpacks Peter's personality, as well as a cast of other biblical characters. He says the book of Mark is action-packed perhaps because of Peter's extroverted influence. Peter is, of course, known for blurting out answers and jumping into action (even out of a boat and onto the water).

But there are also plenty of (seemingly) introverted people in the Bible. As McHugh points out, Jacob was described as "a quiet man" and Moses called himself "slow of speech." Mary the mother of our Lord was filled with introspection and "treasured all these things in her heart." Mary, the sister of Martha, preferred to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen. Or maybe Martha is the introverted one, choosing to stay away from the people to tend the meal? In any case, Scripture is filled with stories about people who not only prefer a few to a crowd, but also may have lacked confidence for responsibilities and expectations thrust upon them.

The apostles appeared to not have enough food, money, and faith, and perhaps we're the same way. We might lack experience and we may think we don't have the expertise, but sometimes what we're really lacking is courage—courage to either step out of our comfort zones, or courage to stand firm (and at peace) with being who we are. There is a sense of accomplishment and contentment with doing both.

When I think of times I've had to speak up in a class or on a committee, speak truth to power under confrontational circumstances, or get behind a microphone to speak to a crowd, it was courage that I

needed. (Being prepared also helped.) Fourteen years ago this summer I needed to tap into that courage to do something that was not remotely in my comfort zone—I was to be keynote speaker at Youth Days hosted by Holden Village, Chelan, Wash. I survived this experience in a venue normally reserved for extroverted and entertaining speakers, but I can still remember sitting down after my first keynote and crying during the closing music. The relief of being done with what I had dreaded was drained from me, but at the same time, I still had three more presentations to go!

The Holden Youth Days weekend is a notch on my introvert belt, and reminds me that I occasionally need to be nudged out of my comfort zone. In her chapter "When Should You Act More Extroverted Than You Really Are," Cain points out that introverts "are capable of acting like extroverts for the sake

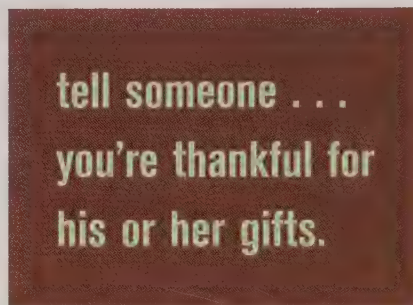
of work they consider important, people they love, or anything they value highly."

But this experience, and others like it, make me aware of what I can do (or what I want to do) and what I can't (or don't want to do). After all, I have other gifts to offer the church and this hurting world.

READY TO SERVE

McHugh, in an interview with *Christianity.com* calls introverts "a tremendous gift: at our best creative, a holy presence, compassionate and insightful... Further, we are capable of an insight that is borne of self-awareness and listening, a peacefulness that spreads to others, and a servant mindset which is often expressed in behind-the-scenes service..."

Thank God for all manner of service and personality types. For bold evangelists like Peter—his questions were the launching pad for key teachings from Jesus after all. And if the Spirit had not put in Peter the ability



and desire to “preach it” we might not be studying this story from Mark today. And thank God for Mark and all the writers and scribes who so faithfully passed on the stories that shape our lives and our church.

We are surrounded with a crowd of witnesses, not just Peter, who cheer us on. Read Hebrews 11 for a pep talk and call on other church members, your family and friends who:

remind us to say no when we need to (and should) say no. Or maybe, just maybe, they nudge us to say yes to something new, something outside our comfort zone—something to which we initially respond, “You can’t *possibly* be serious.”

rescue us and tend to us when we fail, because we will fall short.

encourage us to be true to ourselves. We need those who know us best and love us the most to be our sounding board for how we live out our faith in the world. Either they have an opposite personality type (my spouse is, you guessed it, an extrovert), which can be complementary. Or, they’re similar and can certainly commiserate with us.

But after a good amount of stewing about what we can and can’t do, we remember it’s not all about us. We, too, serve as a compass for others living out their lives of faith.

URGING ONE ANOTHER ON—OR NOT

One of my three young children has the makings of an introvert. We encouraged all three to be in the children’s choir at church, but he insists he doesn’t want to. He prefers to sit in the pew watching his siblings and peers. I’ve asked him again and again, “Don’t you

want to sing with the rest of the kids? You have the nicest voice.”

Note to self: Pay attention to what you’re writing. I need to let Oliver be Oliver. Perhaps I’d be able to play the piano today if Mrs. Onerheim hadn’t insisted that every student play in the recital. Playing on the stage filled me with dread and I begged my mother until she let me quit. I don’t want to force my children into a mold that they simply do not fit. I want them to sing and serve where they’re comfortable and with pure joy (and sometimes with a necessary sense of obligation).

It’s up to us as parents and grandparents, spouses and friends, to lift up those in the body of Christ who we know the best, always remembering that our gifts differ and are wonderfully varied.

If you’re in need of one more pep talk, read about the body’s many members and gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:12 for what may be your millionth time.

Yes, the feet, hands, ears, eyes, nose, and funny bone complete the body. And we would be lost, and less, without all of them—without all of us. Today, spend a few minutes thinking about and thanking God for your own gifts, and this week tell someone close to you—or even a stranger—you recognize and are thankful for his or her gifts.

I’m grateful to you, both introverts and extroverts (if you’re back from the party), for your gifts. But I give particular thanks to the introverts, because I know something about you and what a treasure you are to this church. I’m grateful for your thoughtfulness and listening skills, your empathy and vulnerability—and your struggle.

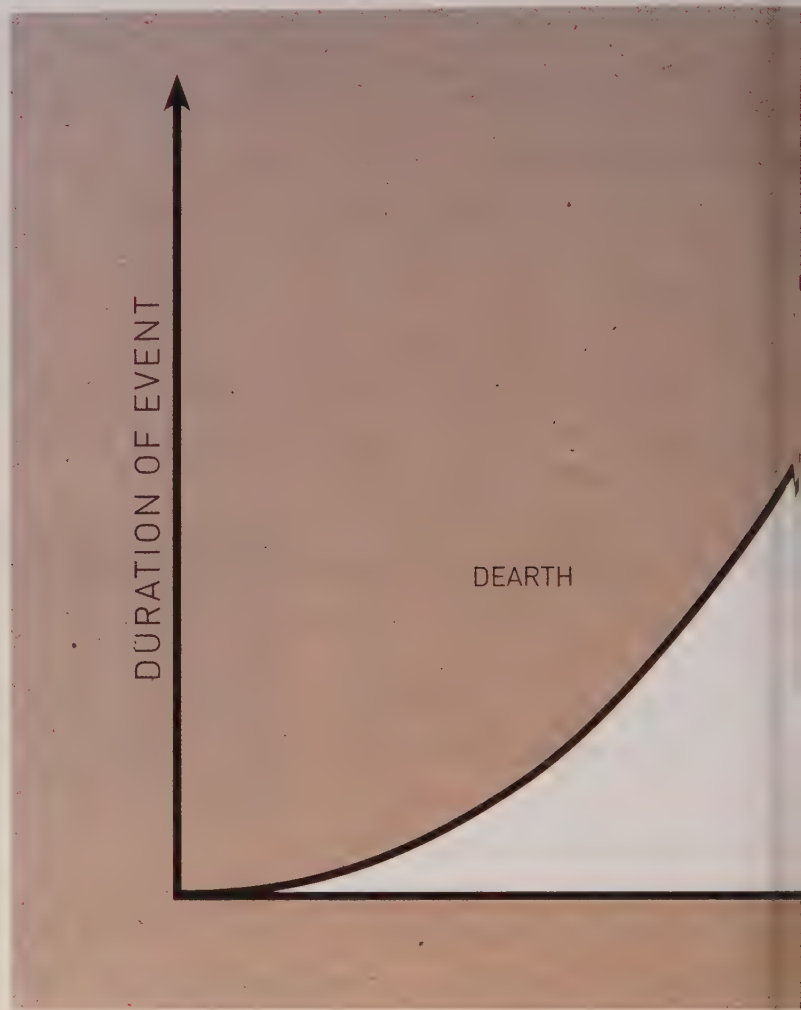
In a world full of talk and “spin,” you bring quiet and sincerity to your service in this body. And that is as important as preaching—and walking on water. And we know neither extroverts nor introverts can do that. So we’re all in this boat together. 🙏

Julie B. Sevig is an associate editor of *The Lutheran* magazine, and as such, feels more comfortable at a computer than a microphone.

THE GOSPEL OF ENOUGH

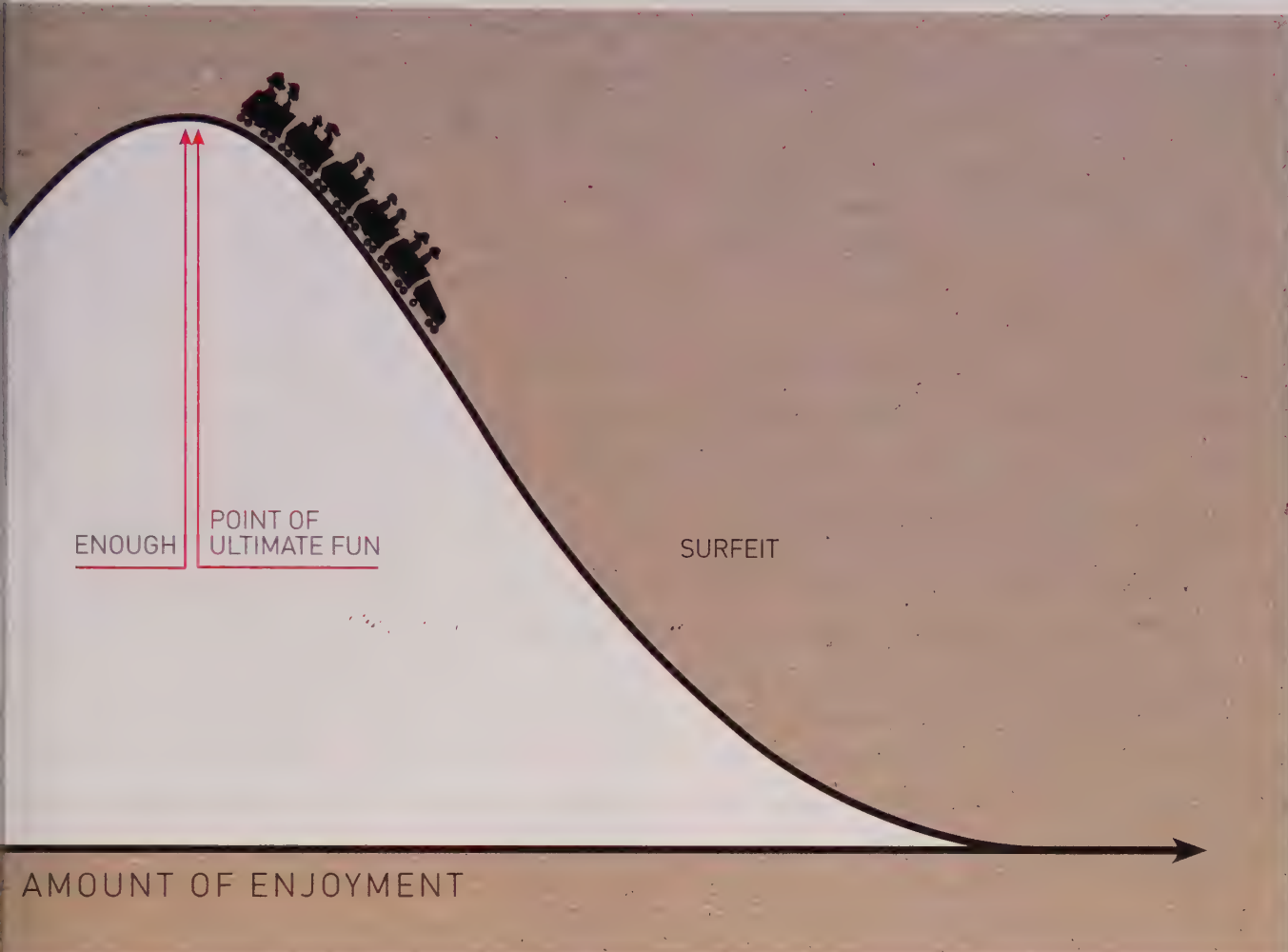
by Megan Torgerson

I love words. I am an English major born of an English major, and the only thing I love more than books are words. I love that words create meaning, that they inspire emotion, that they define and refine the very way we understand ourselves and the world around us. I love some words just for the sounds of them (Crevasse! Quark!) and some I despise for the same reason (Slacks! Moist!). But there are still other words that I don't love because they simply do not inspire emotion. One of those words is *enough*.



GOOD ENOUGH

No one really seems to like that word, to be honest. It rarely gets used in a positive way. When we refer to someone as "good enough," we say that who or what they are will do just fine, but we'd really prefer something bigger, better, or bolder. When we say "enough is enough," we don't mean that we're surrounded by sufficiency, but that we are rolling in ridiculousness. When a detail is "enough to go on," it falls short of telling the complete story and instead just barely tells the story in a way that allows an investigation to continue. Think of all the words we put alongside *enough*: adequate, decent, admissible, tolerable, satisfactory, requisite. Check your thesaurus, and prepare to be underwhelmed. Those words make enough seem barely enough.



No, enough isn't fun. Who wants just enough? We deserve more than enough. We need a better word, one with more excitement, one that looks good on a glossy magazine cover, one that will ring in your ears when you hear it. You deserve a word like . . . *surfeit*. Surfeit means excess: plentitude, plethora, profusion, repletion. Now that's a word you can't get enough of, right? Why settle for enough when you can demand surfeit?

We have been taught to believe that you can never have too much of a good thing, and strangely enough, we seem to believe it.

ULTIMATE FUN

My brother-in-law has a great concept that I am not ashamed to say I have stolen and fully integrated into my life. He calls this profound piece of practical theology: Ultimate Fun.

Ultimate Fun is the point in a great event where you have had just the perfect amount of fun. You're out with friends, or at a dinner party, or at the park with the family, and you realize that, at that precise moment, you will never have more fun than you have had up until that point. It is the ideal amount of fun, and no more. You have reached Ultimate Fun. If you leave at the moment of Ultimate Fun, you

will always look back on that party, night, or trip, as an absolutely perfect time.

But wait, you can't have too much of a good thing, right? Not true. Without fail, if you push past the point of Ultimate Fun, you do not get more fun for your effort. Instead, you get tired, cranky, and overwhelmed. The previously perfect evening is ruined. We are not meant to move past Ultimate Fun, because after that point, it's just not fun anymore.

When I watch for the boundaries of Ultimate Fun during my day, I am reminded that I only ever need or want enough fun. Ultimate Fun helps my family and me put limits on how much fun is enough fun, because sometimes enough of something is really all you need.

I may not love the word *enough*, but enough has all sorts of other beautiful synonyms, which you can find if you left your thesaurus open: bounteous, copious, satisfying, lavish, plenteous. Enough fulfills, never turns sour, does not implode on itself. Enough is Ultimate Fun, giving you always only exactly what you need, meeting your desires so perfectly that you are never overwhelmed by too much. It is an enough that we can be grateful for, never making ourselves or our appetites more than they must be.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Enough doesn't sound like enough, but it's a whole lot more than words like surfeit, excess, or luxury. You should know exactly what you're buying into if you expect surfeit, because surfeit also means to cram, gorge, or glut. None of those words sit well with me. A legitimate dictionary definition for surfeit is "an uncomfortably full or crapulous feeling due to excess." I'm not convinced *crapulous* is a real word, or that I can even repeat it in polite company (I dare you to try it, and tell me how it goes), but you know what it's like to feel crapulous. You know how it felt to push past Ultimate Fun. You felt stuffed full of things in your stomach and in your house and in your purse and in

your day planner and in your life and in your soul. You don't feel satisfied from surfeit. You feel sick. Whether it's the swollen pain of an over-full belly or the gnawing anxiety of an over-full schedule or the empty echo of an over-full demand for wealth, you know how surfeit feels. And it doesn't feel good.

So why is it that we always want more? When we know how poisonous surfeit can be, why do we consistently ignore enough?

Maybe it's because we are afraid.

Maybe you don't feel afraid. Maybe you feel empty, tired, or frustrated from a world or a life that doesn't ever seem to provide enough. But in that perception of scarcity, we act in ways that are not consistent with the truth. When we operate from not enough, we operate from fear. Maybe the reason you're always grabbing for more, always convincing yourself you deserve it, maybe it is because you fear that you are not even close to enough. Perhaps you try to be more because you believe, somehow, that without an abundance of surfeit surrounding you, you are afraid that you don't have enough. Worse than that: You are afraid you are not enough, and you never will be.

For people of faith, fear is truly not an option. We live in the confidence of a God who not only creates, but who provides. God does not leave us to fend for ourselves. "God helps those who help themselves" is not found anywhere in the Bible, no matter how many people think it is. God gives. God is enough. And we who are made in the image of God, are enough.

At the end of the day, how is that surfeit working out for you? How satisfied do you feel in your quest for bigger, for better, for more? Might you feel unsatisfied? God has a different word for us, a word that fulfills one that satisfies. God's word is: *enough*. God's enough is good enough in all the best possible ways. It is only what we need, and it is always what we need. You are enough because God is enough, and in our Creator's abundance we are never left wanting.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

As you hear the good news about Jesus in the miracle of the loaves and the fish, hear it with the ears of one who hungers to have enough, who fears she is not sufficient, who is exhausted from searching fruitlessly for surfeit. Jesus and his disciples are traveling and teaching, helping and healing, moving from place to place. No matter where they go, they're surrounded by crowds, and those crowds are hungry.

Jesus asks his disciples, "So, where shall we go to buy food for everyone?" Can you imagine the look on their faces? "Enough money to get enough bread so that every mouth will have enough to eat? There will never be enough—we could spend six months working non-stop, and we'd still only have enough money for everyone to get a bite. It's impossible." There are among them a few loaves of bread, and a few measly fish. But Jesus is not discouraged. He blesses the food and sends it out into the hungry crowd. He tells the thousands to eat, and as Jesus asks, they eat until they are satisfied. Each person has enough. In the hands of Jesus, there is enough. In fact, just to prove the point, the people gather up the broken bits that are left over, the crumbs on the ground left behind by satisfied mouths. Those humble leftovers filled basket upon basket.

On that day, there was enough for all. Here today, there is still enough. You want to know how I'm so sure about that? Because, child of God, you are enough.

Maybe it's not enough for me to say it once. Let me say it again: You are enough.

Think of those loaves and fish, up against the hungry bellies of thousands of people. They did not seem like enough. But in the hands of Jesus Christ, the bread of life, they fed thousands. They were enough. You might not feel like enough—you might feel paltry, insubstantial, the human equivalent of dried bread and stinky fish. Still, your God calls you—calls you to feed the hungry, tend the sick, visit the imprisoned, condemn the unjust, befriend the stranger, protect the

orphan, sustain the faithless, preach the word, and this without fear or without fail, because in God, there is enough.

You are enough. Through the potency of the Holy Spirit brewing inside you, there is enough in you and enough of you for the rest of the world to have enough. It is not luxurious or superfluous, but it is enough—and that is all you need to have.

ENOUGH TO GO ON

You are surrounded by a world that demands surfeit, a world that monetizes your fear by fooling you into thinking you need more. I challenge you to respond with the gospel of enough. God can and will work in you so that your offering, no matter how small, might be enough not just for you, but for your family, for your congregation, for your community, for your country, for your world. There is a world that is hurting to hear the good news, and you are the one to bear it. You are the one God is calling to love and serve your neighbor, to live in the abundance of God's good gifts, because you are enough.

Words create meaning. When you were baptized, you were named a child of God, and those words worked together with the water to shape a new reality. In this reality, God promised to always be enough for you, and that all you had was enough for the world. This baptismal calling promises that we are blessed with ridiculous abundance. There is enough of God, and with God that *enough* is you.

Maybe I can learn to love enough after all. May we each discover the ridiculousness of God's enough as it gives us exactly what we need, each and every day. 🌸
The Rev. Megan Torgerson is the associate pastor at Augustana Lutheran Church in West St. Paul, Minn., a writer for books like *Crazy Talk* and *The Lutheran Handbook For Pastors*, a graduate of Concordia College and Luther Seminary, a former Miss Minnesota, a beleaguered owner of two dogs and two cats, a macaroni-and-cheese connoisseur, and beloved by an incredibly patient husband.



DO WE HAVE ENOUGH?

by Audrey Novak Riley

BIBLE STUDY

Introduction

We all know the story: A crowd of people follows Jesus out to the countryside, and by the time evening rolls around they're all hungry. The disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so they can go get supper in town, and he answers, "*You give them something to eat.*"

All four gospels give us this story. Three of them give us the command from Jesus in exactly the same words: "*You give them something to eat*" (Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13). Is Jesus talking to *us*?

Hymn

"Take, Oh, Take Me As I Am," (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 814)

Prayer

Creator God,

You know our human limitations and weaknesses and you love us more than we can ever understand.

Help us to do your will as we are able, though that may be far more than we know now.

This we pray through your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

You Can't Possibly Be Serious!

Imagine things are humming along

just fine, you're feeling pretty good about your own part in that, and then someone important comes to you with a request so totally out there that the only thing you can say is, "You can't *possibly* be serious!"

Can you think of a time when you were in that situation? (Every mother in the room is nodding her head.) I remember once when that happened to me.

Not long after I was married and moved to the suburb where we still live, I volunteered for a local women's civic-affairs group, looking

for a way to get involved with my new community and do some good. Most of the other women in the club were lifelong residents and longtime members who knew everyone in town, which is a real asset for people involved in civic affairs.

The women were friendly and made me feel welcome immediately, and before long I was busily involved in the group's doings: registering voters, handing out index cards for audience members, questions at a public meeting, and helping serve as timekeeper for a candidates' forum hosted by a high-school civics club in the next suburb. It was fun and I really enjoyed it.

But a certain issue kept coming up over and over again: I just didn't have enough time or energy to do everything they kept asking me to do—after all, I had a full-time job in the city as well as choir rehearsals and services in my old neighborhood, not to mention a husband who liked seeing me every once in a while—and I kept having to say

no, even when I would have liked to say yes. Then the head of the nominating committee asked me to serve as chair of the most active and publicly visible committee.

Say it with me: "You can't *possibly* be serious!" (See "Just Ask Around," p. 6.)

Let's Talk About It

1. What do you think made the nominating committee head's request so impossible for me? What limitations do you think a newcomer might have had that would have made it hard to be successful as chair?
2. When did you face a request like that? What was it like? Tell the person next to you about it.
3. How did you feel when someone made a request like that and you realized that they actually meant it? What words sprang to your mind, if not your lips?

The Apostles' First Assignment

Now let's turn to the gospel according to Mark, chapter 6, where we'll hear about another astonishing request. As we listen, notice that that this gospel writer is using his favorite literary technique to tell the story—the sandwich. Mark uses this unique storytelling structure at least five times in this short gospel.

In the Markan sandwich, the writer tells the first part of a story (the first slice of bread), interrupts to tell a shorter but complete story (the filling), and then returns to finish the first story (the second slice of bread). The theological meat is in the filling, of course, and the story told in the slices of bread somehow reflects or interprets the story in the filling. And there's almost always a word or phrase that appears near the beginning and again near the end of the sandwich (would it be too cute to call that the toothpick?).

We're going to pay attention to the bread (and a little more) and skip over the filling this time.

The first slice of bread in our sandwich is this: Jesus

sends out the 12 apostles in pairs (6:7–13) to preach repentance, cast out demons and heal the sick, with only the barest of supplies.

The filling (6:14–29) is Herod's suspicion that Jesus is actually John the Baptist returned from the dead, and then the story of how Herod had John killed.

The second slice (6:30) has the apostles returning from their mission journeys and telling Jesus everything they've said and done. And that leads into the story of what happened with the hungry crowds.

Now let's hear the text. You might imagine yourself in the scene as one of the apostles who has just gone out on that important first mission and returned.

READ MARK 6:7–13, 30–37A.

Let's Talk About It

4. What kinds of things did the apostles accomplish on the mission trip? How do you suppose they felt as they told Jesus about how they carried out his important assignment?

Now think about the crowds of excited people waiting on the shore to meet the apostles. What do you think the apostles are thinking and feeling as they realize what the crowds want?

Mark's gospel suggests that there was a lot of excitement about the apostles' return, saying that there were many people coming and going and "they had no leisure even to eat." Is there anyone in your group who has served as a Young Adult in Global Mission or taken part in another mission opportunity, perhaps through Women of the ELCA? Ask her how people acted when she returned. Was there a lot of coming and going and fuss and excitement? Did everyone want to hear about what happened?

The apostles must have been deeply gratified, tired as they were, to realize that not only had they carried out Jesus' assignment so well, but that their reputations as preachers and healers had spread far and wide. Thousands of people hurried on foot from all the

towns to see them. How exciting it must have been. We know that at least some of the apostles just couldn't help having their heads turned by their growing fame.

READ MARK 9:33–34.

Spotlight on the Apostles

As we recall from the first session of this Bible study, the gospel according to Matthew tells the story a little differently—Matthew's focus is on Jesus and the crowds. Mark puts the spotlight on the apostles, Jesus' closest followers. Why do you suppose this is?

Although Mark's gospel appears second in our Bibles, it was actually the first of the four gospels to be written down, probably no later than about the year 70, probably in Rome. A very old and widespread tradition has it that the writer was an associate of Peter, and that Peter's preaching is the source behind this gospel. That's important: Peter didn't sit down and dictate the gospel to Mark in order from beginning to end; he preached it over a period of many years, adapting his interpretation according to the needs of the moment or those of his hearers. After Peter's martyrdom in the year 64, this old tradition tells us, Mark wrote down everything he remembered of what Peter taught about Jesus.

So we can understand this telling of what happened as drawn from Peter's experience and observations. But how did he happen to tell the story the way he did? For that, let's think about the apostle as a person, with his own unique personality, his own unique limitations and gifts.

We know Peter was impulsive and emotional—and talkative. Throughout the gospels, we see him blurting out whatever comes into his head and heart: Scolding Jesus for predicting his own death (Mark 8:32); babbling about building tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (9:5); denying Jesus three times and then going away to weep bitter tears (14:66–72). Have you ever known someone like that, someone who just didn't have a filter between their mind and their mouth? Well, that's

the person whose memory is the source behind the gospel story we're studying, and that person's feelings and reactions are tucked into the story. (See "Gifts of an Introvert," p. 22.)

Let's Talk About It

Everyone is different. Some people glow in the presence of a crowd. Others would rather die than be the center of attention, even admiring attention. And yet others are somewhere in the middle. Which one do you think Peter is? Which are you?

Likewise, some people experience something and then have to talk about it in order to process it. Others experience something and then have to think about it in order to process it, then talk about it. And others are in the middle. Which one do you think Peter is? Which are you? Do you think one way is better than another? What makes you think so?

Jesus Says What?

Let's turn back to the crowd gathered around Jesus and the apostles on the shore. By now it's getting late, and the apostles suggest to Jesus that he send them away so they can go buy their own suppers in town. But Jesus answers, "You give them something to eat."

Our NRSV translation gives us the apostles' response to this outrageous request as, "Are we to go and buy two-hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"

Two-hundred denarii is a *lot* of money. One denarius (the most common coin in the Roman world) was a day's pay for an unskilled laborer, and it would buy 10 days' worth of bread for that laborer—20 pounds! (Romans ate a lot of bread.) Two-hundred denarii would buy two tons of bread—clearly impossible.

The gospel doesn't give us the tone of voice behind the apostles' words, but we can imagine what it might have been. Incredulous. Astonished. Exasperated. (Imagine the tart tone of a certain blustery fisherman.)

In any case, we could paraphrase the apostles' response as: "You can't *possibly* be serious!"

Let's Talk About It

8. Clearly the apostles are sure they don't have *enough* to do what Jesus has asked them to do—not enough food, not enough money, not enough whatever. They don't see any possible way to feed so many people. Quite often, we are sure that we don't have enough *whatever* either—not enough money, not enough people, not enough experience, not enough *whatever*—to make a difference. What have you heard people say they don't have enough of?

More Than Enough

Notice what happens next. Jesus skips over the topic of what the apostles *don't* have and focuses on what they *do* have. Before they know it, their five loaves and two fish, not even enough for one family's picnic, becomes more than enough for everyone in the vast crowd. Scarcity becomes abundance.

In the first slice of bread on our gospel sandwich, Jesus sent the apostles out with nothing but a walking stick and a companion, and they were able to preach and heal and cast out demons. Here in this second slice, Jesus asked the apostles to show him what little they had, and with that, they fed the whole crowd. (See "The Gospel of Enough," p. 26.)

Let's Talk About It

9. What has Christ asked you, your women's group, or your congregation to do lately that you think you don't have enough *whatever* to do? What would happen if you focused on what you *do* have instead of what you *don't* have? How would it make you feel?

In our third and final session of "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly," we'll look at the same event as told in the Gospel of Luke—and then we'll act on Christ's command to feed the hungry people.

Prayer

*Blessed are you, Holy Lord,
for you take us as we are
and love us into what we shall be;
you take the little we offer you
and transform it into abundance,
into strength, into value beyond rubies.
Transform our timidity
into eagerness to serve you in your hungry people.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Hymn

"Take My Life, That I May Be" (ELW 583) 🌿

Audrey Novak Rilev serves the church as associate program director.

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DO WE HAVE ENOUGH?

by Audrey Novak Riley

LEADER GUIDE

At the end of this three-session Bible study, we will act on Jesus' command both locally and globally. Ask participants and others in the congregation to do two things: bring groceries for a local food pantry, and bring monetary gifts for ELCA World Hunger (make checks out to Women of the ELCA and write ELCA World Hunger on the memo line). We will bless both these offerings at the closing prayer of the third study session.

You Can't Possibly Be Serious!

The story about the newcomer and the civic-affairs group is intended to be an icebreaker: Everyone has had the experience of being the newcomer.

The three discussion questions in this section have no right or wrong answers. They simply prepare us for the discussion of the apostles' experience of their own human limitations in the gospel.

If the discussion starts to drift off into talk about what the newcomer's experience might mean to your own women's group, you might suggest that that very useful conversation be saved for another time when it can be explored more thoroughly. Then draw the group back to the topic.

Discussion of Questions 1, 2 and 3 might point out the newcomer's time constraints and lack of local connections as limitations that would have made it hard to be successful. (If people are curious, you can tell them that I finally said yes, struggled through my one-year term as chair, and relinquished the office with relief.)

The Apostles' First Assignment

This section brings in some information about the structure of the Gospel of Mark. If participants are interested and have the time, you might let them know that the five sandwiches are Mark 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–30; 11:12–25; 13:5–23; 14:1–11. Some scholars recognize a few more in the text, but these five seem to be generally agreed on.

Question 4 asks participants to read the text again to name what the apostles accomplished; feel free to ask your reader to read the relevant portions of the text aloud again as many times as participants need.

Question 5 is intended to suggest that the apostles were feeling very pleased with their success and the people's response.

Spotlight on the Apostles

This section brings in a little information about the history of the Gospel of Mark and its possible source. The discussion of Peter's personality invites participants to

understand the human being behind the biblical figure.

The discussion questions about personality types should lead to the conclusion that neither is better than the other. Beyond that, there are no right or wrong answers. If people are interested in exploring the topic further, you might note that for future programs. The free online Women of the ELCA resource "Paths to Wholeness" explores how different personality types can be expressed in our spiritual lives.

Jesus Says What?

This section of our study gives a little historical information (the value of a denarius) and the writer's imagination about the emotion implied in the words attributed to the apostles.

Discussion of Question 8 invites participants to ponder our own lacks and limitations by asking people to talk about what they've heard other people say. You might suggest that the discussion omit names or other identifying details.

More Than Enough

This section holds the point of this entire study. Make sure that participants see that Jesus doesn't focus on what the apostles don't have; he works with what they do have. What Jesus did for the apostles, Jesus can do for us.

The answer to the first part of Question 9 depends on your local situation. If the group seems to stall on this question, you might remind them that this Bible study focuses on Jesus' command to "give them something to eat." For the second part, participants should understand that our view of whatever makes that miraculous shift from scarcity to abundance when we focus on what we *do* have instead of what we don't have.

Before the closing prayer and hymn, remind the group of the offering of groceries for a food pantry and gifts for ELCA World Hunger that will be received at the third and final session of "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly."

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THEME VERSE

"I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall
not be moved. Therefore my heart is
glad, and my soul rejoices; my body
also rests secure."

Psalm 16:8–9

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Kay Ward is a bishop in the Moravian Unity. In 1998, she was the first woman to be chosen as a bishop in the Moravian church's 550-year history. She was ordained in 1979 and has served parishes in Indiana and California. In 2006, Kay retired as professor and administrator of Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pa. She has written three collections of essays and lives in a log cabin in central Wisconsin. Kay and her husband, Aden, have four children and three grandchildren.

As bishop, she led conferences and retreats throughout the Moravian Unity: in South Africa, Switzerland, Great Britain, the Virgin Islands, Germany, the Netherlands, and in the United States and Canada. "It is a privilege to continue to serve my savior and the church in my retirement," she said.

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September 2013 **PROMISES, PROMISES**

We make promises. God makes promises. We can be confident in the promises of God for God's promises are sure.

SESSION 1: HANNAH, A PROMISE KEEPER

"For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." She left him there for the LORD."

1 Samuel 1:27–28

October **THE GIFT OF POWER**

We tend to be hesitant about power, knowing its potential for abuse. But it can also be a gift given to us by God.

SESSION 2: DEBORAH, A DETERMINED LEADER

"At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment." Judges 4:4–5

November **WHERE WE PUT OUR TRUST**

It's easy to trust God when everything is going smoothly. Can we still trust God when the road gets bumpy and the stakes are high?

SESSION 3: THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH, A TRUSTING FOLLOWER

"But she said, 'As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.'" 1 Kings 17:12

December **PROTECTION AND PEACE**

As people of faith, we need to look out for those who are the least able to care for themselves. We can show God's love in the way we treat those who are vulnerable.

SESSION 4: MIRIAM, A LOVING PROTECTOR

"When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him." Exodus 2:3–4

Jan/Feb 2014

OFFERING HOSPITALITY

We want our churches to be inviting and welcoming places. Sometimes we fall short. How do we live out God's hospitality in our communities?

SESSION 5: ABIGAIL, A CALM STRATEGIST

"Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them on donkeys and said to her young men, 'Go on ahead of me; I am coming after you.' But she did not tell her husband Nabal." 1 Samuel 25:18–19

SESSION 6: WOMAN OF ENDOR, A SEER AND COMMUNICATOR

"Then Saul said to his servants, 'Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, so that I may go to her and inquire of her.' His servants said to him, 'There is a medium at Endor.'" 1 Samuel 28:7

March

A HARD JOURNEY

There are times in the life of faith when we find ourselves on a difficult path and we are tempted to turn back. But God's grace will carry us when the way is hard.

SESSION 7: DAUGHTER, AN HONEST VIRGIN

"Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering.'" Judges 11:30–31

April

A LIVING HOPE

In Christ, all things are made new. We can count on renewal and resurrection.

SESSION 8: RIZPAH, A VIGILANT MOURNER

"Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day, or the wild animals by night." 2 Samuel 21:10

May

WITH OUR HANDS

Our hands can heal or harm, reach out or push away. May God make the work of our hands a blessing.

SESSION 9: RAHAB, A FAITHFUL BUSINESSWOMAN

"Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." Joshua 2:12–13



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BIBLE STUDY

ALL ATE AND WERE FILLED

by Audrey Novak Riley

Hymn

"Strengthen for Service, Lord" (ELW 497)

Prayer

Creator God,
 when you ask us to do your will
 you give us everything we need.
 Grant that we may leave our fear behind
 and trust your Son when he asks us
 to go beyond what we see as our limits.
 This we ask through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 One God, forever and forever.

Confidence

Has someone ever had more confidence in you than you had in yourself? So much confidence that they asked you—no, they *expected* you—to do something that you weren't even sure was possible for you? That happened to me recently.

I used to sing with the choir at a church in the city for years. In comparison with my fellow altos, I thought my musical gifts and skills were adequate but not much more

than that, and that was fine with me. *Someone* has to be average, after all, and I was just happy to contribute what I could.

Then my husband and I started attending a church closer to home, and I volunteered with that choir. My new choir director seemed to have an entirely different opinion of my skills than I did. He told me he thought I was a very fine musician, of all things. I thought he was just being nice, but he kept acting as if

he meant it. Sometimes he'd ask me to sing with the sopranos, even at the last minute. (Sight-reading Bach, in German, in public, at the tippy-top of my vocal range. I can't believe I actually did it!)

Then he invited me to sing in the chorus for the annual concert series, alongside *real, trained, professional* musicians, for a *paying* audience! Clearly he wouldn't ask if he didn't think I could do it—but where in the world did he get that idea? What could I possibly say?

Let's Talk About It

1. What do you think made the choir director's invitation so surprising to me?

2. When did someone expect more of you than you thought you were capable of? What was it like? Tell the person next to you about it.

How did it feel to know that someone had that much confidence in you? Did you do anything differently because of their faith in you?

Jesus' Confidence

Now let's turn to the gospel according to Luke chapter 9, where we'll hear about Jesus' confidence in his disciples—and why he was so confident.

READ LUKE 9:10–13A.

This sounds almost exactly like the story in Mark's gospel that we looked at in Session 2 of this study, doesn't it? There's a reason for that. Luke tells us in the beginning of this gospel that he drew on many sources to tell the story in an orderly fashion. Scholars have determined that the Gospel of Mark is one of the main sources.

A few verses before this, in Luke 9:1–6, Jesus had sent the disciples out to proclaim the good news and heal the sick. He told them not to bring any supplies with them, not even a change of clothes. Look at Luke 9:6. They not only proclaimed the good news through the villages, they cured diseases “everywhere.”

Let's Talk About It

4. Jesus gave the disciples a big assignment when he sent them out to the villages in Luke 9:2. Do you think they were confident that they could do it? Why or why not? Do you think Jesus was confident that they could? Why or why not?
5. In Luke 9:13, Jesus clearly expects the disciples to be able to give the crowd something to eat. What do you think gave him that idea?

“No, Not A Thing.”

Much later in Luke's gospel (22:35), Jesus asks the disciples, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?”

That's an interesting question, and the answer is even more interesting. The disciples could have answered him, “Well, I didn't have any money,” or “Clean socks would have been nice,” but they didn't say anything like that. They said, “No, not a thing.”

How could that be? How could they lack nothing when they went out with nothing? How could they succeed as missionaries—medical missionaries, at that—without any equipment? Take a look at Luke 9:2. Jesus gave the disciples the power to do what they needed to do in order to carry out their mission. Jesus equipped them. (See “The Gospel of Enough,” p. 26.)

Apostle Paul, who thought deeply about these things, wrote a letter from prison to the believers in Philippi. In it, he wrote about how he kept on through everything he endured on his own mission trips: “I can do all things through [Christ Jesus] who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The important part of that sentence isn't the first part but the second: “Jesus . . . strengthens me.”

Jesus strengthened his disciples for their mission trip (Luke 9:2). He equipped them with what they needed in order to carry out the assignment he gave them. The gospel names not only the power to cure diseases, but “power and authority over all demons.”

The gospel writer understood demons differently than we do; we certainly wouldn't say that a child with epilepsy had a demon. But I think if the gospel writer includes in that category of demons whatever causes us to lie to ourselves and whatever causes us to believe those lies—well, I think we could go along with that. Jesus strengthened the disciples and gave them the power to cast out—even from themselves—the demons that whisper, “Don't be silly, you can't do that. Who do you think you are?” or “Don't ask for things that way. What will people think?”

What Jesus did for his disciples then, he continues to do for us now. If you have an *ELW* hymnal handy, take a look at page 237, the Affirmation of Baptism. The presiding minister asks, “Do you intend . . . to proclaim the good news . . . [and] serve all people, following the example of Jesus?” That sounds pretty much like the mission Jesus sent the disciples out on, doesn't it? The baptismal ritual has us all answer, “I do, and I ask God

to help and guide me.” *There*. That’s the key. With God’s help and guidance—with Jesus strengthening us—we can carry out the mission we’ve been given. Who do we think we are? We think we’re disciples of Jesus Christ, who strengthens us and equips us for mission. What will people think? They might think we’re pretty bold, and that’s what happens when Jesus not only gives us an assignment but also gives us everything we need—resources, wisdom, generosity and friends to help us along the way—to carry out that assignment. Jesus has confidence that we can carry out his mission because he has equipped us for that mission.

Let’s Talk About It

6. When the disciples went out on their mission trip, they didn’t bring anything with them. How do you think they arranged for such basics as food and lodging?
7. If you believed that Jesus was strengthening you and equipping you for mission, would you do anything differently than you do now? What? How would you do it differently?

Jesus Reminds Us When We Forget

When the disciples ask Jesus to send the crowds away so they can buy their own suppers and Jesus answers with that astonishing request, “You give them something to eat,” the disciples are caught flat-footed. They’ve clearly forgotten what happened on their successful mission trip: Jesus had equipped them to carry out his assignment. If Jesus had made it possible for the disciples to do something that looked impossible then, wouldn’t he do the same thing again?

In all three versions of the story we’ve looked at in this study, we see that Jesus doesn’t spend any time on the disciples’ fears or protests or smart-aleck remarks about tons of bread. He simply says, “Show me what you have.” He doesn’t let them dwell on what they *don’t* have; he shifts the focus to what they *do* have.

What do they have? To our eyes, not much. But

with Jesus, it’s more than enough, because he has already equipped them with everything they need. (See “Seven Tips for Service,” p. 12.)

Let’s Talk About It

8. If you were to follow Jesus’ example and focus on what you do have instead of what you don’t have, would you do anything differently? How? What would you do differently?
9. If Jesus were to say to you today, “You give them something to eat,” what would you say? What would you do?

Prayer

Our closing prayer concludes with our offering of groceries for a local food pantry and our offering of monetary gifts for our church’s ministry with those who are hungry, ELCA World Hunger.

This ritual calls for one leader and two readers, as well as two assistants to gather the offerings. Envelopes may be gathered in a basket; groceries may be placed together in grocery bags or baskets. Please feel free to improvise or elaborate on this basic outline. Musicians and decorators are invited to add their services, as well.

Note to the leader: You might remind participants that they can give to ELCA World Hunger through Womankind of the ELCA. Simply make out the check to Womankind of the ELCA and write “ELCA World Hunger” on the memo line.

Leader: Let us pray.

Loving and ever-giving God, you give us all we need to carry out your will. Grant us wisdom to turn away from our own fears and act joyfully when your Son asks us to give the people something to eat. This we ask through your son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of John, the 21st chapter.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you

love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Leader: When Jesus speaks to Peter, he is speaking to all his disciples, even to us, his present-day followers. When Jesus tells us, through Peter, to feed his sheep, we know that he has supplied us with everything we need to carry out his mission.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, "Do you love me?"
All: Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.
Reader 2: Jesus says, "Feed my lambs."
All: I will, with God's help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, "Do you love me?"
All: Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.
Reader 2: Jesus says, "Tend my sheep."
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Reader 1: Jesus asks, "Do you love me?"
All: Yes, Lord, you know that we love you.
Reader 2: Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."
All: I will, with God's help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, "Do you lack anything?"
All: No, not a thing. We are equipped for mission.
Reader 2: Jesus says, "You give them something to eat."
All: We will, with God's help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, "Do you lack anything?"
All: No, not a thing. We have been equipped for mission.

Reader 2: Jesus says, "You give them something to eat."

All: We will, with God's help and guidance.

Reader 1: Jesus asks, "Do you lack anything?"

All: No, not a thing. We have been equipped for mission.

Reader 2: Jesus says, "You give them something to eat."

All: We will, with God's help and guidance.

Leader: Jesus has equipped us for mission, and so we act on his command with confidence and joy.

Assistants may help gather the offering of groceries and monetary gifts into a central place visible to all. As the offering is received, the leader may describe the local food pantry that will receive the groceries, and another person may describe the ministry of ELCA World Hunger, which works to alleviate hunger and poverty in more than 50 countries around the world, including the United States.

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God!

Hymn

"All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly" (ELW 461) 🌿

Audrey Novak Riley serves the church as associate program director, ELCA World Hunger.

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ALL ATE AND WERE FILLED

by Audrey Novak Riley

LEADER GUIDE

Confidence

This section is simply intended to help each participant consider the idea of someone having confidence (you might call it faith) in her.

There are no right or wrong answers to the first three discussion questions, but the leader might ensure that certain points arise in the discussion:

The choir director was confident in my abilities because of the other times he had asked me to stretch past what I thought were my abilities. He had ascertained that I was equipped with everything I needed to carry out the assignment, even if I didn't realize it. (If people are curious, the leader can tell them that I said yes, and the concert was wonderful.)

Jesus' Confidence

This short section focuses on the reason why Jesus was confident that the disciples could carry out his request to feed the hungry crowd. He had already seen how they carried out a previous assignment, and he knew that he had already equipped them with everything they needed.

Question 4 is intended to bring out the point that even if the disciples weren't confident in their own abilities, Jesus was, because he knew that he had equipped them with everything they needed.

Question 5 is meant to lead to the conclusion that

Jesus was confident that the disciples could carry out this new assignment because he knew that, again, he had equipped them with everything they needed, whether they knew it or not.

"No, Not A Thing."

This longer section contains the point to this entire Bible study: Jesus strengthens us. We can confidently answer, "I will, with God's help and guidance," because that help and guidance will always be there.

The short discussion of the power to cast out demons is this writer's own interpretation of what that can mean for us today. We women are sometimes reluctant to act even on what we know is right because we have false ideas about ourselves. The truth—and Jesus is the Truth—will set us free.

There are no right or wrong answers to the discussion questions, but Question 6 is intended to suggest that the disciples were equipped to ask people to help support their mission by supplying food, lodging, money, and so on. It's a fact that people actually like to help; they like to be asked and they will often respond more generously than we expect. That might have happened with the hungry crowd, as well: The disciples might have asked the people to give what they could to help their neighbors, and the people might have responded more generously than anyone expected.

Jesus Reminds Us When We Forget

This section reminds us that we don't need to worry; Jesus will supply what we need to carry out the assignments he gives us.

There are no right or wrong answers to the last two discussion questions. You might suggest that participants take these questions home and ponder them privately in prayer as well.

Prayer

The suggested ritual is only a basic outline; please feel free to elaborate or improvise on it with joyful music, decoration, dance—whatever will honor the generosity of the participants.

After all, we're responding together to Jesus' call to feed the hungry, and that's worth celebrating!

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Our church is a leader in the movement to end hunger and poverty in the world, and ELCA World Hunger is how we do it. Thanks to the generous support of ELCA members through-

out the church, ELCA World Hunger empowers families and communities around the world to lift themselves out of poverty and into self-sufficiency—for good.

Please visit www.ELCA.org/hunger for much more about our church's ministry to end

hunger and poverty, for resources you can use in your own congregation, and for ways you can be involved as a volunteer hunger leader.

Your generosity in service, prayer, and giving is what makes ELCA World Hunger as effective as it is. Thank you.

The peace of Christ be with you always.

We are a church that believes God is calling us into the world – together. Working with Lutheran churches in the U.S. and around the world, ELCA World Hunger is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need with innovative solutions that get to the root causes of hunger. Thank you for your prayers, your partnership and your gifts.

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MEET THE 2013–2014 BIBLE STUDY WRITER



Kay Ward

IN GOOD COMPANY

by Kay Ward

IT'S a beautiful snowy morning in December, and the wood stove is purring with warmth. I have a cup of coffee at my side as I begin to write for the July/August issue. I have been thinking of this article since I started writing the Bible study earlier in 2012. I am so humbled in having been asked to undertake this exciting project for the Women of the ELCA. You have been in my mind all these months of writing. I have been "In Good Company."

Beginning in September, company's coming! I have invited nine women from the Old Testament, several from the New Testament, and a handful of women I know to stop in for a visit. They will be companions with us each month, long enough for us to get to know them and also to get to know ourselves a bit better.

Their stories will draw us into Bible study, invite us to worship with the Psalms, and give us opportunities to tell our own stories.

I knew about many of the Old Testament women before I began, but I didn't know their whole story. Now that I know them better, I have grown fond of each and every one of them. They have come to my house in my imagination, have helped themselves to a cup of coffee, and have taken a seat on my couch while I wrote. I will confess, some of them I did like better than others, but they were all interesting and eager to share their stories.

We grow in our faith as we read the stories of these women—not that we want to become like them but because they are like us, and we feel kinship with these

long-ago sisters. The women from the New Testament may be even more familiar to many of us but we learn something new from searching their heartaches and their faithful decisions.

The psalms of the Old Testament are the hymnal for the women we read about, so each month, we start with a psalm, using some new tools to make them more accessible. I have also included some contemporaries, women from my family and circle of friends. God continues to reveal truths to us through the women (and men) we meet along the way.

There has been a mystery in this project. I am a very linear kind of woman, and in the past, before I started to write, I wanted to see the whole project planned out, clear through to the end. (I am one of those people who actually *likes* to make outlines.)

This time, I made a list of the nine women we would study. Then I started to think about what order we would use to write about them, but I couldn't decide. I just knew that I needed to start with Hannah. As I finished up that first chapter, I was led to begin writing about Deborah. And so it went—with each chapter revolving from the last one. I kept being surprised. This isn't my usual style but as the chapters were completed, I began to enjoy the unknowing. Trust in such a project is a small thing but I grew from the experience. I did experience God at my right hand (and at my left) and my heart has been very glad to have been given this opportunity.

Our theme text is Psalm 16:8–9:

"I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure."

A Cup of Coffee (or Tea)

I have chosen to write each chapter as if I were speaking to each of you, personally. I imagine you joining Hannah or Deborah on the couch with your cup of coffee (or

tea). I have posed many questions for you to consider in each chapter. Sometimes those questions have right answers, but usually the question is meant to stimulate conversation rather than coming up with a correct answer. In my teaching, I have found that asking questions about a text is a terrific way to get at the meaning, faithfully.

When we ask questions about the biblical women, we are entering into a relationship with them. Though the years separate us, we get small glimpses of their lives, their thoughts, and their motivations.

To get to know the biblical women, I think we can use the same tools that we might use if we were on a long plane ride. Seated next to a woman and wanting to pass the time, we begin to ask questions. We begin to see into her life. We don't get the whole story, and we might make some assumptions about her that wouldn't prove to be true but it could still be a satisfying experience. Those same questioning tools are helpful when we are reading stories about women, living or dead. In each chapter, I have taken the opportunity to write the questions that came into my mind but I encourage you to ask questions of your own.

I hope that you will bring your Bible with you to your meetings because I also have provided many references that relate to the chapter stories. It's fun to read the details that provide the background of the stories and they help us to see these Old Testament women in their context and culture.

You might begin by asking me a question, like “What is a Moravian doing writing the Bible study for Women of the ELCA?” I am not a Lutheran, true, but we are kin! I became a Moravian when I was very young, attending a small church in our neighborhood in Madison, Wis. At an early age, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher, but God began to pull at me and I figured that I would go to the mission field and teach. At that point the Moravian Church did not ordain women, but my call to serve God became as strong

as my resolve to be a teacher. College gave me the opportunity to major in religion and education, and by that time, I had fallen in love with my high school sweetheart, Aden. Through some wondrous acts of God, we married, I taught school, my husband became a Moravian pastor, and I followed him into ministry.

I left for Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, Pa., with three pre-school age children. Twelve years in ordained ministry in Indiana and California and a D.Min. degree from Claremont School of Theology in California prepared me for 15 years on the faculty and staff at Moravian Theological Seminary, the perfect place to live out a call to theology and education. Those two threads have been woven into my life in a powerful and profound way.

Who Are the Moravians?

I have spent my life in the Moravian Church, which is one of the oldest Protestant denominations, dating back to 1457 with followers of John Hus in Europe. Moravians first came to America in 1735, bringing with them a strong tradition of ecumenical work while settling in Bethlehem, Pa., and Winston-Salem, N.C., which are still centers of our church in North America.

Moravians are best known for their missionary work and their rich musical heritage. We believe that faith is not simply a list of statements about us or our church, but is based on relationship. Our relationship with Jesus Christ provides a basis for our relationships with each other.

Those relationships have shaped our polity with conferences made up of laity and clergy to govern us in geographical provinces. There are two provinces

in North America and more than 20 provinces in the world-wide unity.

We have three orders of ministry: deacon, presbyter, and bishop (the Moravian Church began ordaining women in the early 70s). Bishops are spiritual guides, intercessors for the church, and pastors to pastors, but they do not hold an administrative office by virtue of election as a bishop. I was elected a bishop of the Moravian Unity in 1998, the first woman to be chosen in the 550 years of our history. There is no humble way to write that but it is part of my story. It is a privilege to continue to serve my Savior and the church in my retirement.

Writing has always been a passion of mine and for many years I wrote a column for a local newspaper. Those columns were collected into two books of essays and I have written a third book in my retirement.

The little essays and stories I write are ways for me to honor and remember the details of my life, the wonderful happenings of our family, some adventures from my travels, and the joy of living in a log cabin in the woods of Wisconsin. In that cabin, Aden is companion, woodcutter, snowplower, and excellent first-draft proofreader. 🌿

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Kay Ward is a bishop in the Moravian Unity. In 1998 she was the first woman to be chosen as bishop in the Moravian church's 550-year history. Ordained in 1979, she is a retired professor and administrator of Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pa. She has written three collections of essays and lives in a log cabin in central Wisconsin. Kay and her husband, Aden, have four children and three grandchildren. Her books are available at store.moravian.org.





GRACE NOTES

Expect a Blessing

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



Can you believe it?

In just one year we'll be gathering in Charlotte, N.C., for our Ninth Triennial Gathering with the theme "of many generations." Every triennial gathering is full of fun and fellowship, to be sure, but the gathering is much more than just a weekend away. The gathering is a spiritually transformational event.

When ordinary women come together at a triennial gathering, the Spirit transforms them. Sometimes it's the music that sparks the change. It can be the provocative words of a speaker or the challenge presented in a workshop. It can even be the gentle words one woman speaks to another as they wait in line for a meal.

When you and your friends join me in Charlotte next July, what might you expect? You might dance and sing, praising God with thousands of other women. You might get fired up about a social issue. You might hear God's call, finding yourself considering a missionary assignment or looking at seminary admission brochures. You might be called to change careers through a keynote address. You might learn a new skill in a workshop.

Speakers, leaders, and exhibitors have been prayerfully selected to challenge, replenish, and support your commitment to grow in faith. The gathering collects us as one. We gather not because we have it all figured out but because we continue to learn the ways God heals, unites, and renews. Come, expecting a blessing! I distinctly remember a moment at the 1990 gathering as the

experience rolled over me and I thought, "If this is what the women's organization is all about, I want to be part of it!" After attending that event, I was asked to serve on my synodical women's organization board. That led to serving as a triennial convention delegate in 1993. I began writing for our magazine, led workshops at the 1999 gathering, and in 2002 became executive director of the organization. The potential exists that the life of all who attend a triennial gathering will be changed, just as mine has.

Are you ready for transformation? What will next summer's event bring about for you? As you continue saving money for the gathering, why not begin praying about the gathering too? Pray for yourself and all who attend, and also pray for the planners and leaders.

If you're not able to attend the gathering, are there women in your congregation who you might help financially so that they can attend? Who among your congregational sisters needs to hear and experience transformation?

Registration for the Ninth Triennial Gathering will open in September. You can learn more about the gathering by visiting womenoftheelca.org. Every synodical organization has a triennial gathering promoter (TGP). She's someone local who can come to your congregation and talk about the gathering. Won't you consider inviting your TGP to an event this fall? 🌸

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

The Ninth Triennial Gathering

is July 24–27, 2014.

Go to www.womenoftheelca.org

in late August to learn more.



AMEN!

Sustained for Service

by Catherine Malotky

Oh, God, a world of need spreads out before me like an endless landscape. You invite me, even call me, to see all of your creation as worthy of redemption, and you created me to be your partner in the work of bringing good, hope, and new life to those places where evil, discouragement, and death are having their way.

But who am I, God, to bring civility and respect back into our political discourse? How can I intervene in a world where little girls are too often the only marketable property at their family's disposal? How do I slow down the damage done by our fossil-fuel-driven economy, to turn the tide of our climate's change? What actions of mine can take away the grief of a loved one's death? How can I feed a hungry planet when the hunger takes so many forms?

I am not enough, God. My gifts are limited. My energy is limited. My resources are limited. My hope, I must confess, is sometimes limited. My vision can too easily zero in on me and mine. Though I believe I must give from a full well, if my well is shallow and unreliably supports even me, what then? How can I stretch beyond myself, to love all of your children as you do?

I look to Jesus, but he is divine after all. You, God, are the only one who can give it all and still have something left to give.

But maybe, just maybe, you do not ask me to give it all. Maybe you call *me*, not some superhero, to your service. Could it be? Perhaps this is the miracle of the body of Christ. We all bring what

we have. Not more. Not less. And we work together.

Could it be, God, that sometimes our work will bring huge changes? Sometimes we will turn corners and lives will be improved! Sometimes children will find hope and resilience because we brought food, or read out loud, or supported a music lesson. Sometimes our congregations will be healthier because we insisted that we fight fair, or speak well of each other, or open ourselves to the world around us.

Could it be, God, that sometimes our work will make imperceptible differences, until we look back with hindsight? What about that candy-wrapper litter, retrieved and carried to a trash container? Who saw? Who learned? What about growing backyard veggies to eliminate long shipping distances? What about a patient presence, a willingness to hear the grief again? This moment of grace will have paved the way for healing someday.

O God, you have surrounded me—within and without—with assets for my using. Open my eyes to this abundance. Give me courage to create possibilities and forgive me when my vision narrows and I see only what I lack. Remind me that you are God—and that I don't have to be. You call me with joy and promise to the sacred work of redemption. Sustain me that I might serve. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pastor, serves at Luther Seminary as a philanthropy adviser. She has served as a parish pastor, editor, teacher, and retreat leader.



ASK HER ABOUT **gather**

Vi Gauerke wears *Gather* magazine like a crown. An active member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Waupaca, Wis., Vi serves in many capacities—recruiter, phone-caller, organizer, historian, Bible study leader, hostess, cook, president, and more. To support and advertise *Gather* magazine, Vi wore her homemade *Gather* crown to Trinity's Women of the ELCA congregational unit annual meeting earlier this year. She also wore it to both church services that day.

— submitted by Bonnie Pegel, president of the synodical women's organization of the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin

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